

## The One Thing

Keller Papasan—2012.

### The One Thing

- “Be like a postage stamp – stick to one thing until you get there.”-Josh Billings
- What’s the ONE Thing you can do this week such that by doing it everything else would be easier or unnecessary?
- Where I’d had huge success, I had narrowed my concentration to one thing, and where my success varied, my focus had too.
- “Going small” is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do.
- Extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.

### The domino effect.

### Success leaves clues.

- If today your company doesn’t know what it’s one thing is, then the company’s one thing is to find out.
- Everyone has one person who either means the most to them or was the first to influence, train, or manage them.
- No one succeeds alone. No one
- Passion for something leads to disproportionate time practicing or working at it. That time spent eventually translates to skill, and when skill improves, results improve. Better results generally lead to more enjoyment, and more passion and more time is invested. It can be a virtuous cycle all the way to extraordinary results.

### Part one: the lies they mislead and derail us.

- THE SIX LIES BETWEEN YOU AND SUCCESS
  1. Everything Matters Equally
  2. Multitasking
  3. A Disciplined Life
  4. Willpower Is Always on Will-Call
  5. A Balanced Life
  6. Big Is Bad

### Chapter 4: everything matters equally

- **When everything** feels urgent and important, everything seems equal. We become active and busy, but this doesn’t actually move us any closer to success. Activity is often unrelated to productivity, and busyness rarely takes care of business.
- The question is, what are we really about? Knocking out 100 tasks for whatever the reason is a poor substitute for doing even one task that’s meaningful. Not everything matters equally, and success isn’t a game won by whoever does the most.

- While to-dos serve as a useful collection of our best intentions, they also tyrannize us with trivial, unimportant stuff that we feel obligated to get done—because it’s on our list.
- Achievers do sooner what others plan to do later and defer, perhaps indefinitely, what others do sooner.
- Achievers always work from a clear sense of priority.
- **To-do lists** tend to be long; success lists are short. One pulls you in all directions; the other aims you in a specific direction. One is a disorganized directory and the other is an organized directive. If a list isn’t built around success, then that’s not where it takes you. If your to-do list contains everything, then it’s probably taking you everywhere but where you really want to go.
- Juran’s great insight was that not everything matters equally; some things matter more than others—a lot more. A to-do list becomes a success list when you apply Pareto’s Principle to it.
- There will always be just a few things that matter more than the rest, and out of those, one that will matter most.
- **BIG IDEAS**
  1. Go small. Don’t focus on being busy; focus on being productive. Allow what matters most to drive your day.
  2. Go extreme. Once you’ve figured out what actually matters, keep asking what matters most until there is only one thing left. That core activity goes at the top of your success list.
  3. Say no. Whether you say “later” or “never,” the point is to say “not now” to anything else you could do until your most important work is done.
  4. Don’t get trapped in the “check off” game. If we believe things don’t matter equally, we must act accordingly.

### **Chapter 5: multitasking.**

- There is a price for this. “The cost in terms of extra time from having to task switch depends on how complex or simple the tasks are,” reports researcher Dr. David Meyer. “It can range from time increases of 25 percent or less for simple tasks to well over 100 percent or more for very complicated tasks.” Task switching exacts a cost few realize they’re even paying.

### **Chapter 6: a disciplined life.**

- **There is this pervasive** idea that the successful person is the “disciplined person” who leads a “disciplined life.” It’s a lie. The truth is we don’t need any more discipline than we already have. We just need to direct and manage it a little better.
- Success is actually a short race—a sprint fueled by discipline just long enough for habit to kick in and take over.
- It takes an average of 66 days to acquire a new habit
- Those with the right habits seem to do better than others. They are doing the most important things regularly and, as a result, everything else is easier.
- Build one habit at a time. Success is sequential, not \_ simultaneous. No one actually has the discipline to acquire more than one powerful new habit at a time. Successful people aren’t superhuman at all; they’ve just used selected discipline to develop a few significant habits. One at a time. Over time.

## Chapter 7: willpower is always on will-call

- Think of willpower like the power bar on your cell phone. Every morning you start out with a full charge. As the day goes on, every time you draw on it you're using it up. So your green bar shrinks, so does your resolve, and when it eventually goes red, you're done. Willpower has a limited battery life but can be recharged with some downtime.
- Everyone accepts that limited resources must be managed, yet we fail to recognize that willpower is one of them.
- The implications are staggering. The more we use our minds, the less minding power we have.
- **The studies concluded** that willpower is a mental muscle that doesn't bounce back quickly. If you employ it for one task, there will be less power available for the next unless you refill. To do our best, we literally have to feed our minds, which gives new credence to the old saw, "food for thought." Foods that elevate blood sugar evenly over long periods, like complex carbohydrates and proteins, become the fuel of choice for high-achievers—literal proof that "you are what you eat."
- If your willpower is dragging, will you grab the bag of carrots or the bag of chips? Will you be up for focusing on the work at hand or down for any distraction that drops in?

## Chapter 8: a balanced life

- Still, the term "work-life balance" wasn't coined until the mid-1980s when more than half of all married women joined the workforce. To paraphrase Ralph E. Gomory's preface in the 2005 book *Being Together, Working Apart: Dual-Career Families and the Work-Life Balance*, we went from a family unit with a breadwinner and a homemaker to one with two breadwinners and no homemaker. Anyone with a pulse knows who got stuck with the extra work in the beginning. However, by the '90s "work-life balance" had quickly become a common watchword for men too. A LexisNexis survey of the top 100 newspapers and magazines around the world shows a dramatic rise in the number of articles on the topic, from 32 in the decade from 1986 to 1996 to a high of 1,674 articles in 2007 alone.
- In your effort to attend to all things, everything gets shortchanged.
- The reason we shouldn't pursue balance is that the magic never happens in the middle, magic happens at the extremes.
- An 11-year study of nearly 7,100 British civil servants concluded that habitual long hours can be deadly. Researchers showed that individuals who worked more than 11 hours a day (a 55-plus hour workweek) were 67 percent more likely to suffer from heart disease.
- In the world of professional success, it's not about how much overtime you put in, the key ingredient is focused time over time. To achieve extraordinary results you must choose what matters most and give it all the time it demands. This requires getting extremely out of balance in relation to all other work issues.
- **Imagine** life is a game in which you are juggling five balls. The balls are called work, family, health, friends, and integrity. And you're keeping all of them in the air. But one day you finally come to understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. The other four balls—family, health, friends, integrity—are made of glass. If you drop one of these, it will be irrevocably scuffed, nicked, perhaps even shattered."

## Chapter 9: big is bad.

- We are kept from our goal, not by obstacles but by a clear path to a lesser goal—Robert Braulf.
- Thinking big is essential to extraordinary results. Success requires action, and action requires thought. But here’s the catch—the only actions that become springboards to succeeding big are those informed by big thinking to begin with. Make this connection, and the importance of how big you think begins to sink in.
- Derreck Kayongo recognize both the waste and hidden value in getting new soap into hotels every day. So in 2009 he created the Global Soap Project, which has provided more than 250,000 bars of soap in 21 countries, helping combat child mortality by simply giving impoverished people the chance to wash their hands.
- Dweck’s work with children revealed two mindsets in action—a “growth” mindset that generally thinks big and seeks growth and a “fixed” mindset that places artificial limits and avoids failure.

## Part two: the truth, the simple path to productivity.

### Chapter 10: the focusing question.

- Research shows that asking questions and improves learning and performance by as much as 150%
- MY WAGE By J. B. Rittenhouse
  - I bargained with Life for a penny,
  - And Life would pay no more,
  - However I begged at evening
  - When I counted my scanty store.
  - For Life is a just employer,
  - He gives you what you ask,
  - But once you have set the wages,
  - Why, you must bear the task.
  - I worked for a menial’s hire,
  - Only to learn, dismayed,
  - That any wage I had asked of Life,
  - Life would have willingly paid.
- how we phrase the questions we ask ourselves determine the answer is that eventually become our life
- What’s the one thing I can do such by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?
- Powered by the Focusing Question, your actions become a natural progression of building one right thing on top of the previous right thing. When this happens, you’re in position to experience the power of the domino effect.

### Chapter 11: the success habit.

- **For me, the Focusing** Question is a way of life. I use it to find my most leveraged priority, make the most out of my time, and get the biggest bang for my buck. Whenever the outcome absolutely matters, I ask it. I ask it when I wake up and start my day. I ask it when I get to work, and again when I get home. What’s the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be

easier or unnecessary? And when I know the answer. I continue to ask it until I can see the connections and all my dominoes are lined up.

- **Here are some Focusing** Questions to ask yourself Say the category first, then state the question, add a time frame, and end by adding “such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?” For example: “for my job, what’s the ONE Thing I can do to ensure I hit my goals this week such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”
  - FOR MY SPIRITUAL LIFE ...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to help others...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my relationship with God ...?
  - FOR MY PHYSICAL HEALTH...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to achieve my diet goals ...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to ensure that I exercise...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to relieve my stress...?
  - FOR MY PERSONAL LIFE ...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my skill at \_\_\_\_...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to find time for myself...?
  - FOR MY KEY RELATIONSHIPS,
    - “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my relationship with my spouse/partner ...?”
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my children’s school performance ...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to show my appreciation to my parents...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to make my family stronger
  - FOR MY JOB...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to ensure that I hit goals?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my skills
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to help my team succeed
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to further my career
  - FOR MY BUSINESS ...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to make us more competitive
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to make our product the best. .. ?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to make us more profitable ...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve our customer experience
  - FOR MY FINANCES...
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to increase my net worth ...?
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to improve my investment cash flow.
    - What’s the ONE Thing I can do to eliminate my credit card debt

## **Chapter 12: the path to great answers.**

- People do not decide their features, they decide their habits and their habits decide their futures--- F.M Alexander.
- So if “What can I do to double sales in six months?” is a Great Question, how do you make it more powerful? Convert it to the Focusing Question: “What’s the ONE Thing I can do to double sales six months such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary. Turning it

into the Focusing Question goes to the heart of success by forcing you to identify what absolutely matters most and start there. Why?

- Because that's where big success starts too.

### **Part three: extraordinary results, unlocking the possibilities within you.**

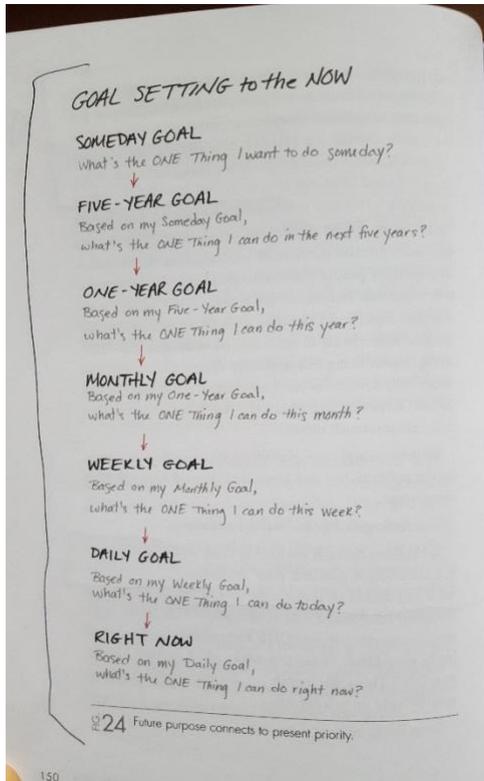
- There is a natural rhythm to our lives that becomes a simple formula for implementing the ONE Thing and achieving extraordinary results: purpose, priority, and productivity.
- Your big ONE Thing is your purpose and your small ONE Thing is the priority you take action on to achieve it.
- The more will productive people are, the more purpose and priority are pushing and driving them.
- All business people want productivity and profit, but too many fail to realize that the best path to attaining them is through purpose driven priority.

### **Chapter 13: live with purpose.**

- As I reflect on this story, I believe Dickens reveals purpose as a combination of where we're going and what's important to us.

### **Chapter 14: live by priority.**

- **Live with purpose and you know** where you want to go. Live by priority and you'll know what to do to get there.
- The way to create a powerful priority as "Goal Setting to the Now" to emphasize why we were creating a priority in the first place.
- The truth about success is that our ability to achieve extraordinary results in the future lies in stringing together powerful moments, one after the other. What you do in any given moment determines what you experience in the next. Your "present now" and all "future nows" are undeniably determined by the priority you live in the moment. The deciding factor in determining how you set that priority is who wins the battle between your present and future selves.
- **Economists** have long known that even though people prefer big rewards over small ones, they have an even stronger preference for present rewards over future ones—even when the future rewards are MUCH BIGGER. It's an ordinary occurrence, oddly named hyperbolic discounting—the farther away a reward is in the future, the smaller the immediate motivation to achieve it
- **By thinking through the** filter of Goal Setting to the Now, you set a future goal and then methodically drill down to what you should be doing right now. “



- **Research** backs this up. In three separate studies, psychologists observed 262 students to see the impact of visualization on outcomes. The students were asked to visualize in one of two ways: Those in one group were told to visualize the outcome (like getting an “A” on an exam) and the others were asked to visualize the process needed to achieve a desired outcome (like all of the study sessions needed to earn that “A” on the exam). In the end, students who visualized the process

performed better across the board—they studied earlier and more frequently and earned higher grades than those who simply visualized the outcome.

- **People tend to** be overly optimistic about what they can accomplish, and therefore most don’t think things all the way through. Researchers call this the “planning fallacy.” Visualizing the process—breaking a big goal down into the steps needed to achieve it—helps engage the strategic thinking you need to plan for and achieve extraordinary results. This is why Goal Setting to the Now really works.
- In 2008, Dr. Gail Matthews of the Dominican University of California, recruited 267 participants from a wide range of professions (lawyers, accountants, nonprofit employees, Marketers, etc.) and a variety of countries. Those who wrote down their goals were 39.5 percent more likely to accomplish them. Writing down your goals and your most important priority is your final step to living by priority.
- Pull your purpose through to a single priority built by Goal Setting to the Now, and that priority—that ONE Thing you can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary—will show you the way to extraordinary results.

## Chapter 15: live for productivity.

- Productivity isn't about being a workhorse, keeping busy or burning the midnight oil... It's more about priorities, planning and fiercely protecting your time
- Productive action transforms lives.
- To achieve extraordinary results and experience greatness, time block these three things in the following order:
  - Time block your time off
  - Time block your ONE Thing.
  - Time block your planning time.
- Extraordinarily successful people launch their year by taking time out to plan their time off. Why? They know they'll need it and they know they'll be able to afford it. In truth, the most successful people see themselves as working between vacations. Resting is as important as working
- **In A Geography** of Time, Robert Levine points out that most people work on "clock" time—"It's five o'clock. Till see you tomorrow"—while others work on "event" time—"My work is done when it's done." Think about it. The dairy farmer doesn't get to knock off at any certain time; he goes home when the cows have been milked. It's the same for any position in any profession where results matter. The most productive people work on event time. They don't quit until their ONE Thing is done.
- The key to making this work is to block time as early in your day as you possibly can.
- **My recommendation is** to block four hours a day. This isn't a typo. I repeat: four hours a day. Honestly, that's the minimum. If you can do more, then do it.
- Block an hour each week to review your annual and monthly goals.
- "'Based on where I am right now, what's the ONE Thing I need to do this week to stay on track for my monthly goal and for my monthly goal to be on track for my annual goal?" You're lining up the dominoes.
- The people who achieve extraordinary results don't achieve them by working more hours. They achieve them by getting more done in the hours they work.

## Chapter 16: the three commitments.

- When you commit to time block your ONE Thing, make sure you approach it with a mastery mentality. This will give you the best opportunity to be the most productive you can be, and ultimately the best you can become. And here's what's interesting: the more productive you are, the more likely you are to receive several additional payoffs you would otherwise have missed
- Mastery is a pursuit that keeps giving, because it's a path that never ends. In his landmark book *Mastery*, George Leonard tells the story of Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo. According to legend, as Kano approached death, he called his students around him and asked to be buried in his white belt. The symbolism wasn't lost. The highest-ranking martial artist of his discipline embraced the emblem of the beginner for his life and beyond, because to him the journey of the successful lifelong learner was never over.
- When coaching top performers, I often ask, "Are you doing this to simply do the best you can do, or are you doing this to do it the best it can be done?" Although it's not meant to be a trick

question, it trips people up anyway. Many realize that although they are giving their best effort, they aren't doing the best that could be done, because they aren't willing to change what they are doing. The path of mastering something is the combination of not only doing the best you can do at it, but also doing it the best it can be done. Continually improving how you do something is crucial to getting the most from time blocking.

- Too many people reach a level where their performance is “good enough” and then stop working on getting better. People on the path to mastery avoid this by continually upping their goal, challenging themselves to break through their current ceiling, and staying the forever apprentice.
- Taking complete ownership of your outcomes by holding no one but yourself responsible for them is the most powerful thing you can do to drive your success.
- One of the fastest ways to bring accountability to your life is to find an accountability partner.
- **Earlier, I discussed** Dr. Gail Matthews's research that individuals with written goals were 39.5 percent more likely to succeed. But there's more to the story. Individuals who wrote their goals and sent progress reports to friends were 77 percent more likely to achieve them.
- Find a coach. You'll be hard-pressed to find anyone who achieves extraordinary results without one.

#### **Chapter 17: the four thieves.**

- **THE FOUR THIEVES OF PRODUCTIVITY**
  - Inability to Say “No”
  - Fear of Chaos
  - Poor Health Habits
  - Environment Doesn't Support Your Goals
- In the two years after his return in 1997, Steve Jobs took the company from 350 products to 10. That's 340 no's.
- Personal energy mismanagement is a silent thief of productivity.
- For you to achieve extraordinary results, the people surrounding you and your physical surroundings must support your goals. No one lives or works in isolation. Every day, throughout your day, you come in contact with others and are influenced by them. Unquestionably, these individuals impact your attitude, your health—and ultimately, your performance.

#### **Chapter 18: the journey.**

- **Let me share a way you** can do this. Write down your current income. Then multiply it by a number: 2, 4, 10, and 20—it doesn't matter. Just pick one, multiply your income by it, and write down the new number. Looking at it and ignoring whether you're frightened or excited, ask yourself, “Will my current actions get me to this number in the next five years?” If they will, then keep doubling the number until they won't. If you then make your actions match your answer. You'll be living large.
- It's only when you can imagine a bigger life that you can ever hope to have one.
- Extraordinary results require you to go small.
- Getting your focus as small as possible simplifies your thinking and crystallizes what you must do.

## Putting the one thing to work.

For brevity's sake, I'll shorten the Focusing Question, so be sure to add "... such that by doing it everything will be easier or unnecessary?" at the end of each question!

- YOUR PERSONAL LIFE
  - Let the ONE Thing bring clarity to the key areas of your life. Here's a short sampling.
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do this week to discover or affirm my life's purpose...?
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do in 90 days to get in the physical shape I want...?
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do today to strengthen my spiritual faith...?
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do to find time to practice the guitar 20 minutes a day...? Knock five strokes off my golf game in 90 days...? Learn to paint in six months...?
- YOUR FAMILY
  - Use the ONE Thing with your family for fun and rewarding experiences. Here are some options.
    - What's the ONE Thing we can do this week to improve our marriage
    - What's the ONE Thing we can do every week to spend more quality family time together...?
    - What's the ONE Thing we can do tonight to support our kid's schoolwork...?
    - What's the ONE Thing we can do to make our next vacation the best ever...?  
Our next Christmas the best ever...? Thanksgiving the best ever...?
- Please know that these are simply examples. If they apply to you personally, then great. If not, then use them to prompt you to discover what areas you might explore that matter to you. And don't forget time blocking. Time block with yourself to make sure the things that matter get done and the activities that matter get mastered. In some cases, you'll want to block time to find your answer and, other times you'll just need to block time to implement it.
- YOUR JOB
  - Put the ONE Thing to work taking your professional life to the next level. Here's a few ways to get started.
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do today to complete my current project ahead of schedule ...?
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do this month to produce better work
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do before my next review to get the raise I want...?
    - What's the ONE Thing I can do every day to finish my work and still get home on time...?
  - YOUR WORK TEAM
    - Pull the ONE Thing into your work with others. Whether you're a manager, executive, or even a business owner, bring ONE Thing thinking into your

everyday work situations to drive productivity upward. Here are some scenarios to consider.

- In any meeting ask. What's the ONE Thing we can accomplish in this meeting and end early?
- In building your team ask. What's the ONE Thing I can do in the next six months to find and develop incredible talent...?
- In planning for the next month, year, or five years ask. What's the ONE Thing we can do right now to accomplish our goals ahead of schedule and under budget.
- In your department or at the highest company level ask. What's the ONE Thing we can do in the next 90 days to create a ONE Thing culture?
  - [www.The1thing.com/discuss](http://www.The1thing.com/discuss)
- And remember that the secret to extraordinary results is to ask a very big and specific question that leads you to one very small and tightly focused answer.